

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

writes, "that most holy virgin said to me in secret: 'Know, most beloved son, that the greatest desire thou hast will soon be fulfilled.' At this I was astonished ; for I could think of nothing that I longed for in the world, while I was prepared to reject all that it could offer. Therefore I said: ° O dearest mother, what is the greatest desire that I have?' 'Look,' she said, * into thy heart.¹ And I answered her: ° Certainly, most beloved mother, I can find no greater desire in myself than to keep always near you.' And she straightway replied: ' And this will be.' But I could not comprehend the way in which this could suitably happen, considering our different conditions and position ; but He, to whom nothing is impossible, ordained in a wondrous way that she should go to Avignon to Gregory XI ; and so, albeit unworthy, I was accepted as one of this holy company, thinking it a little thing to leave parents, brothers, sisters, and kindred, and deeming myself blessed in the enjoyment of the presence and familiar friendship of the virgin Catherine."¹

It was probably from Florence that Neri di Landoccio started for Avignon. " To thee, most beloved and dearest son in Christ sweet Jesus," Catherine wrote to him, while he was waiting at Pisa for the ship that was to take him to Marseilles, " I write in His precious blood, with the desire of seeing thee united and transformed in the fire of most burning charity, so that thou mayest be a vessel of love to carry the name and the word of God, with His great mysteries, into the presence of our sweet Christ on earth, and mayest bear fruit by inflaming his desire." He was the bearer of a letter imploring the Pope to imitate Christ, the Good Shepherd, in his dealings with the rebels, to make peace with them, and devote his powers to the reformation of the Church. " I beseech you, reverend father, to give and

¹ *Epist.* «'/.», §§ 4, 5, 9. Bartholomaeus Senensis, *op. cit.*, Lib. V. cap. I, tells a curious story of how Stefano, after joining Catherine's family, was led into attending a secret meeting against the government in the vaults under the Spedale, in which several of the aristocratic members of the confraternity of Our Lady's *dtscifRnati* were involved, and of the penance which he inflicted upon himself at her bidding for the seditious words that he had uttered.